

February 21, 2017

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am here today to urge legislators to protect students and to invest in Connecticut's local public schools! I would like to call upon all legislators to renew their commitment to public education and a democracy that provides an education for all students.

The Governor has announced a proposed budget that would shift \$400 million, nearly one-third of the cost of municipal schoolteachers' pensions, onto cities and towns next fiscal year.

This proposed budget will undermine local public education and increase taxes at the local level dumping a major portion of the state's obligation to fund the teacher's retirement system onto the back of local towns and taxpayers. This strategy would require Connecticut's cities and towns to make drastic cuts to local education and increase local property taxes in order to make up any cost shift.

Rather than address the fact that the State of Connecticut already underfunds it public schools, the Governor's budget announces a proposal that will further exacerbate Connecticut's failed school funding policies.

This proposed budget does little more than redirect a relatively small amount of existing funds from wealthier and middle-income towns to Connecticut's poorest communities. This amount of money won't have a profound impact for poor towns, but it will certainly ensure major cuts to local schools in a large number of towns and lead to significantly higher property taxes in the majority of Connecticut's communities.

At the same time, the Governor is proposing allowing those towns that received a cut in aid to reduce their minimum expenditure requirements, thereby literally lowering education quality in the majority of Connecticut's towns.

In order to accomplish the goal of redirecting education dollars to districts, the Governor's plan proposes a significant change to the way in which poverty is defined, a factor that drives how much money towns get under Connecticut's education formulas. Presently, poverty is based on the number of students who qualify for free or reduced-priced meals in each community. But the Governor's proposal would replace that system with the number of people who participate in the state's health insurance plan for children, called Husky A, health care provided through Medicaid. The concern is we would be underestimating poverty. This new system raises significant equity issues.

The governor's proposed changes to ECS and special education funding, coupled with his proposal to require towns to pick up one-third of the cost of teacher

pension costs, will make it impossible for small towns to fund education without staggering increases in local property taxes or school program cuts. This proposal will divert resources away from our smaller communities in a way that spells absolute disaster for local property taxpayers and schools.

While it remains unclear whether the Governor's new education funding plan includes a "money follows the child formula" that would force local districts to use local tax dollars to subsidize the privately owned and operated charter schools in their communities, the Governor's budget does shovel even more unaccountable state taxpayer funds to the charter school industry.

In addition to providing more than \$111 million a year to Connecticut's charter schools, the governor's plan adds \$11 million in scarce state funds so that charter schools can expand enrollment and \$10 million more to increase the per pupil amount charter schools collect from the state. It is exasperating to see the Governor's plan pump even more scarce tax funds into the charter school industry.

While 31 Connecticut communities would see a possible increase in education funding, 138 of Connecticut's school districts would be losing resources under the Governor's new proposal and all towns would take a massive hit due to his effort to shift \$400 million of teacher pension payments directly onto local taxpayers.

Call it devastating or simply a vicious attack on Connecticut's public schools; the Governor has proposed a new state budget that destroys Connecticut's already failing constitutional requirement to adequately fund its public schools.

In an effort to avoid raising state taxes and maintain the state's system of coddling the rich from paying their fair share, the Governor's plan seeks to redirect existing state aid for public schools to Connecticut's poorer towns by slashing grants to wealthier and middle income communities.

Making the situation far worse, the Governor's budget plan allows most towns to redirect what education aid they will receive away from their public schools. Rather than requiring towns to maintain their school budgets, Connecticut communities could use what aid they receive to pay for non-education expenditures in the general fund.

While the Governor has claimed that his plan was designed to take from the rich and give to the poor, the state's middle-income communities are among the hardest hit by this new funding formula.

The governor's proposed education budget endangers the quality of our local public schools. Connecticut needs to carry out its constitutional obligation and fully fund public education, giving all children the resources they need to achieve.

Every day local public school teachers are asked to do more with less. Our public schools are places that invite all students to reach their full potential and one day become contributing members of our society. Our legislators need to understand this vision and invest in public education so all can succeed.

Regards,

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